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L.A. Oddities

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Burned by the Big Cheese

By Richard Meltzer

At this very paper, back in, oh, '78 or '79, the big cheese burned me on a sports column that lasted only three weeks. The premise had been for me to regularly insult local teams and superstars — something I didn't mind doing — and after reading my first column, he said, "This is exactly what I want. Keep it up." I did. The second week he was not quite as enthusiastic. By the third week, his line had changed to "This is not what I want at all" — though by "I" it turned out he meant one of the paper's early backers (I won't name names, but his father, I'm told, once played Spartacus), who had taken offense to things I wrote about Steve Garvey or somebody. I was canned.

To "make it up" to me, the big cheese let me do a cover story — "no interference" — on the local sporting whatsis of my choice: boxing at the Olympic Auditorium. This was stuff I cared about, took quite seriously, and I wanted to get it right. I went to the fights two weeks running, took notes on every round, wrote, rewrote, many drafts, used every minute. I asked the cheese for a word limit, and when he gave me one I asked him, just to be sure, "You sure?" I have a habit of going over, and this time I didn't wanna risk a single word being cut. I came in on the nose. Best sports piece I ever wrote.

But after I turn it in, the cheese decides he wants it shorter, and instead of calling *me*, he gives it to a hireling with the instruction: "Cut by a third."

The hireling, the paper's music editor, proceeds to cut EVERY THIRD SENTENCE . . . I'm not making this up . . . thus destroying all continuity, all interest, all reason for the damn thing to be on the cover where anyone might notice it.

To make *this* one up to me, Mr. Big was gonna take me to the Ali-Holmes fight, but it never happened.

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